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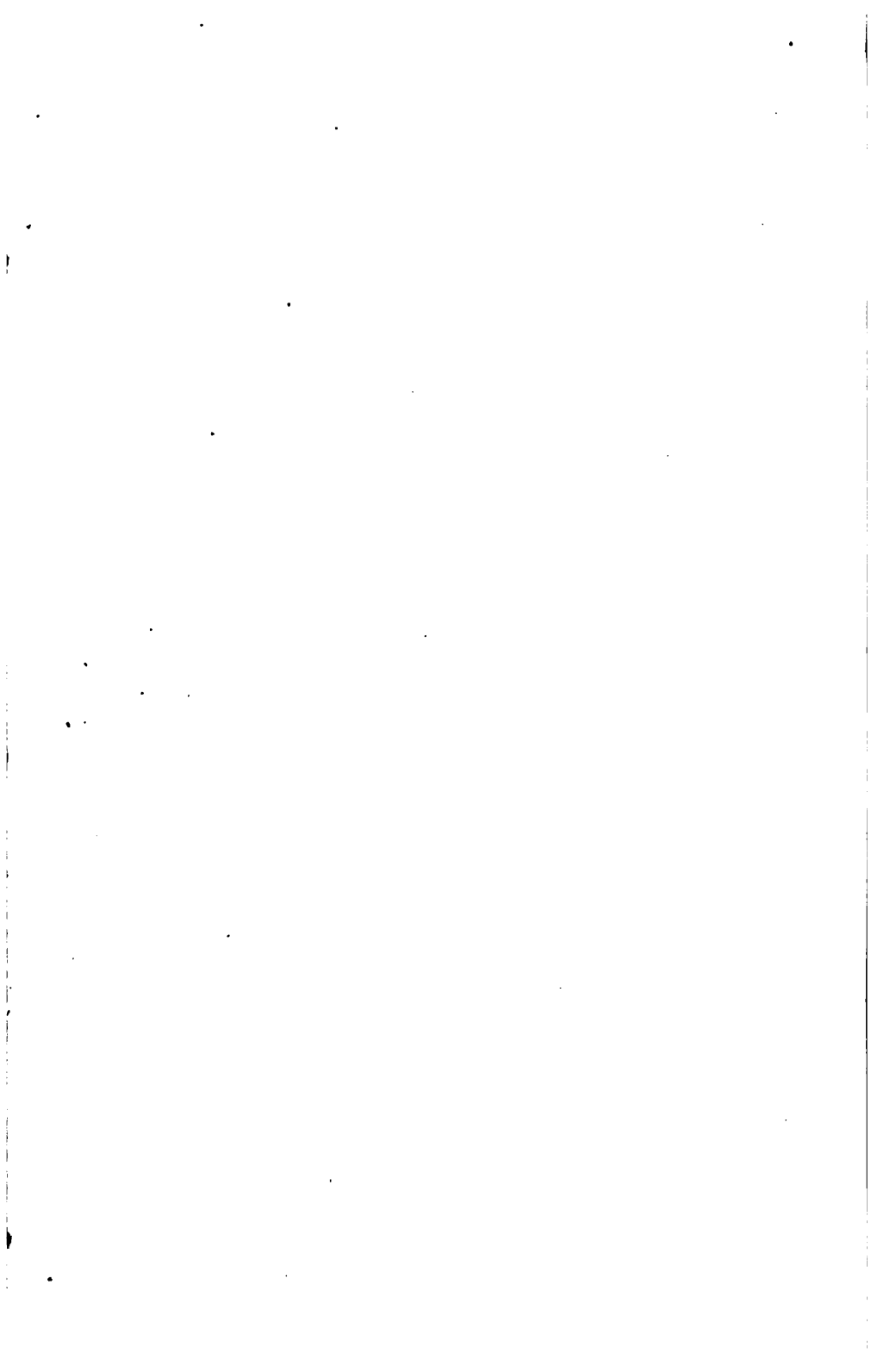
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LETTER

TO

A YEOMAN

IN FAVOUR OF

ABOLITION OF CHURCH RATES.

BY

THE REV. GILBERT ELLIOT,

RECTOR OF KIRKBYTHORE, WESTMORELAND.

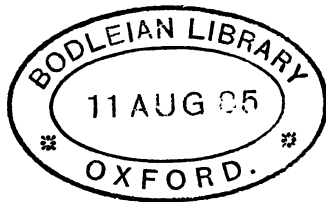
LONDON:

JAMES RIDGWAY AND SONS, 169, PICCADILLY.

MDCCCXXXVII.

11126.e.1.

LONDON:
Printed by W. Clowes and Sons,
14, Charing Cross.



A LETTER.

MY GOOD FRIEND,

WHEN I reached home, after my long discussion with you on the plan which the Government has proposed for the abolition of Church Cess, I thought I could do no better than jot down the heads of your objections to that plan, and my answers, so that I might at the more leisure consider whether there was any real weight in what you had advanced, or any fault and weakness in the reasons on which I had adopted a contrary opinion.—When I had done this, I thought further that I might as well publish what I had written. Others, perhaps, and I dare say my best friends, may think that I might as well have left it alone; they may fear for me that I shall be called exceedingly presumptuous, in coming forward and taking a course exactly opposite to what far the greatest proportion of my fellow-labourers in the ministry have adopted; and, to say the truth, if I had been aware of any publication by any other minister of the Church in favour of the views I entertain, I should not have ventured to obtrude my opinions upon even the small circle within which, in all probability, they will circulate.

I cannot however bear patiently to see malice and falsehood and hypocrisy allowed to do their work in regard to this measure of abolition, without one effort being made to counteract them, by some servant of that Church, against

which it is said to be aimed. Jealous as I ought to be of the great and sacred interests with which I am by ordination, and not less by affection, connected, I cannot patiently bear to see the Church dragged wantonly into uses of political warfare; I cannot quietly endure to hear the cry of "the Church in danger," employed by designing and unscrupulous politicians, to hoodwink those who are honestly attached to it, and only employed, not because they who use it believe their own cry, but because they deem it the surest way of unseating the present Government.

Hence I publish the substance of our discussion. If I can thereby do anything towards allaying causeless fears, or making plain the truth, I shall neither care to have incurred the imputation of presumption, nor, what is worse to bear, the reproachful coldness of my brethren in the ministry. At any rate I can scarce conceive that honesty of intention will be denied to me, whatever may be thought of my attempt otherwise: for assuredly I cannot be supposed to be hostile to an establishment from which I derive my livelihood, and in which I hold preferment far above the average of what is held by others.

Before, however, I grapple with your objections, I must make a clear stage for myself, by going back to my assertion, that malice, falsehood, and hypocrisy have been all pressed into service on this question. Now, God forbid that I should charge, or be supposed to charge, all who object to the Government plan, as doing so, only from malice, or as hypocrites, or by falsehood. There is one consideration at least connected with the plan, which offers wide scope enough for very conscientious difference of conclusion, and to which I shall presently more particularly allude. But I wish to be understood, as deliberately affirming my belief *that far the greater number* of those who take a prominent part in the discussions on this

question use it but as a political instrument for hampering and injuring the present Government.

Now, whether His Majesty's ministers be right or be wrong in their politics generally is quite beside this particular case. But surely if they be wrong in any matter, we have not quite forgotten so much of our old honest English feeling as not to care for fair play. Let us at least then have the truth; and if the ministry have done wrong, why, the sooner you cease to support them the better. But suppose you find that the party who are so active in assailing the Government can be proved to have acted so unfairly by them as not to tell the truth,—as to conceal much,—as to falsely colour much,—what should you think of them? First of all, certainly, that they cannot make out a fair case against Government; and next, that their own case must be an exceedingly bad one. But how would you treat them, if you were just? Why, exactly as you would treat unfair play in any other matter. You should make them know and feel that you have found them out: you should take care, on every opportunity, to show them how utterly you despise and reject the base and foolish cunning, which had presumed to juggle with your attachment to your religion, and had hoped to make that a means of unjustly injuring others, and of accomplishing their own selfish ends.

But have I any proof of this dishonesty on the part of many of those who take the lead in opposing the Abolition of Rates? I think, much; such as, I have no doubt, before I have done, will satisfy you of the justice of my accusation. The proof will arise as I go through the course of our discussion.

I. As I remember, when I asked you for your objection to the abolition of Church Cess, you said “you were not willing to take away from parishes the right of taxing themselves for the repair of their churches; that you would

be very sorry to see them falling into ruin, and never would grudge the little you had to pay toward the maintenance of your own." And I could be no less sorry than you would be to see all provision for the repair of churches cut off: and moreover I honour, and ever will do all I can to cherish the attachment which you feel for that old church, which has looked upon so many generations of those who now sleep, close within the shadow of its walls. I have often wondered how even all the perversion of sectarian zeal, or headlong impatience of jealous pride, or malice of extremest ignorance, could so prevail over any one heart as to extinguish there every particle of veneration and of affection for that hallowed pile, whose weekly bell has through long ages, without ceasing and without tiring, sent throughout the hamlet clustering round its base the message of peace and of rest,—at whose font, through many long ages, each new born child has been baptized to Christ,—at whose altar our forefathers pledged their honest hearts to the mothers of our race,—in whose graves now rest all that has passed from ourselves, of what we have held dear. I should be ashamed indeed to think, that there can be many who lack love for what belongs, not to this or that denomination of Christians, but belongs to the whole country, as but one family. I should be surprised, indeed, if you did not offer sturdy resistance to any project, the effect of which might be to let these holy and beautiful edifices go to decay. *But where do you meet with any such design of cutting off all funds for keeping your churches in repair?* You tell me you so find it charged against the Government plan, by men of high rank and station at a large meeting held in London; by members also of both houses, in their places in Parliament; in many newspapers; and in some petitions which you have seen. I do not know whether these persons in their speeches, petitions, and news-

paper articles, do really intend to state, that the Government plan will leave parishes without any means of maintaining their churches at the public expense, but I grant to you that their language is such as may very well account for your having taken up such a notion ; I grant to you that it appears especially framed to lead the unwary to suppose that they are making such a charge against ministers. They must therefore take the consequences, and so I tell you, that any person, be his name what it may, and be his station what it may, who states of ministers that their plan is, *to abolish Church Rates, and not to substitute any other fund in its stead for repairing churches*, states an arrant falsehood, and that his object is only to deceive you, and that he is one of those whom I accuse of being malicious and hypocritical,—of descending to the basest means in the hope of supplanting political rivals. The real fact is, as you may easily ascertain if you only will be just enough to inquire, that ministers simply propose to abolish Church Rates because they suppose that they can provide *better* means for securing the *same* end. So do not suffer yourselves to be misled any more by men who would not try to deceive you if they had any confidence in the goodness of their own case, and who prove by such dishonesty that they can have little sense of that religion for which they affect so much regard.

II. I grant it is fair matter of discussion, whether the Government plan be a better means, or not, than the present system of Church Cess, for providing for the wants of the Church, and into that discussion we now enter. You said you thought that the present system ought to be maintained in preference to the Government plan, and your reasons for so thinking were much to this purpose, "That you did not see why the power in parishes to rate all persons within it was to be taken away, simply because the

Dissenters choose to grumble at cess-paying ; that you did not see, if there were to be a National Church at all, why all parties should not be forced to contribute to its support whether they like that Church or no, just as all parties are obliged to pay toward the maintenance of the army and navy, which the country thinks it right to keep up, though many stoutly contend that both of them are far larger than necessary, and would very willingly be relieved of the burden of maintaining them." So far as I am concerned, I am very ready to admit the full justice of your statement. So long as the nation, through those organs by which the nation's mind is known, chooses to have a National Church, I cannot see why, if a tax of any kind be necessary for its perfect efficiency, that tax should be less imposed on all persons within the realm, than any other tax needed for national purposes. If it could be shown that a parochial cess were absolutely necessary to make up the funds through which the Church could by possibility be duly maintained, I do not know why the Dissenter should be more released from the liability to be cessed than from the payment of tithe. If his being a Dissenter is good argument for relieving him from Church Cess, I should like to be told why it is less a good argument for his being relieved from the payment of tithes. So that, for my part, I fully agree with you, that if the nation means to uphold a Church Establishment, and *if the parochial cess be absolutely necessary toward the maintenance of that Church in due efficiency*, the Dissenter has no claim to be relieved from the liability to such cess, simply because he is a Dissenter.

But now, my good friend, you have gained nothing by this concession on my part, for you will observe that I have been all along supposing that a Church Rate were absolutely necessary to maintain the Church ; that is to say, that without a Church Rate the Church could not be maintained.

But in truth, I am most perfectly convinced that no such rate is necessary at all for any such purpose ; for I have another fund offered to me, by the Government plan, which, as to amount, is fully adequate to take the place of those sums generally raised by rate ; and I prefer this fund, in many respects, to that which depends on parochial rating ; and I would, for my own part, do my utmost to obtain it from the legislature, even if there were not one Dissenter in the kingdom.

We have agreed that if the nation pretends to support a Church at all it ought to do so efficiently ; but I do not suppose that you will disagree with me in thinking that the legislature is bound, in duty to the country, to provide that this should be done in the least burdensome manner to the community. I do not doubt you will insist with me, that if a fund can be substituted for tithes or rates, or both, which shall equally or better uphold the Church in all its branches, and yet at the same time press more lightly on the country, the cheaper ought immediately to be preferred to the more expensive method. Now this is just the ground on which I mainly place my own support to the Government plan. By that plan a fund is obtained, not by taxing anybody, but by improving property, which cannot be improved without the interference of the State ; and, in my opinion, as the Government has done nothing but its duty in endeavouring to relieve the country from a tax, which, because of this fund, becomes altogether unnecessary, so would we be most foolish to refuse the relief thus offered. Some may sneer at this, as what is called a pound, shilling, and pence view of the subject ; but be quite persuaded of one thing, that the greatness of this country, and the continued prosperity of every individual within it, mainly depend (because of the heavy burdens with which we are laden) upon our taking a very rigid pound, shilling, and pence view of every matter

connected with public taxation. So do not allow yourself to be sneered out of your good sense by any such silly gibe.

But I have another reason for preferring the Government plan to the present system. Under the present system there is no kind of uniformity at all :—first of all, there is no certainty that you can get any rate whatever ; next, you may, after much bickering and ill-blood, get one far too small for any useful purpose whatever ;—or else, in some easy parishes, your churchwardens may manage to get from you very handsome pickings, in shape of accounts, for work done, or goods supplied by themselves. Now the Government scheme rectifies all these things : it provides a certain fund, so that in future no parish shall be denied means amply sufficient to uphold its Church ; and, moreover, it takes away all possibility of jobbing, by placing the repairs under a surveyor duly appointed by competent authority. It is very well to talk big, and say, “ Why, if rates can be denied, let the law be amended ; ”—but who is to amend the law ?—Can you get it amended ?—Are you not aware that out of Parliament there are a very great number of Churchmen, and a very great number of Dissenters, who think that a better plan can be adopted than the continuance of Church Cess, and are therefore very urgent to see the change for the better made ?—Are you not aware that in Parliament there are so great a number opposed to Church Rates, as will not suffer their longer continuance ?

But suppose there were no doubt that if the mind of the churchmen of England were really bent upon the matter, they could, *in time*, secure any Act which they might choose to have passed, and suppose there were little doubt that such an Act, if passed, might be enforced, I ask, would it, in sooth, be worth while to make this great effort ?—is it really worth while to agitate the country from end to end, to awake angry passions, to strengthen enmities, to rend the very heart

of the community for the purpose of perpetuating a tax from which you might be relieved, and yet at the same time the object of the tax be otherwise most fully provided for?

III. I can scarcely expect from any quarter, I mean any honest quarter, other answer than what you made me. You said, "You would grant that, if the Establishment could be made, and kept, such as it ought to be, by substituting the fund offered by Government, for parochial cess, such cess ought to be remitted; but you were not sure whether the wants of the Establishment could spare the right of cess, over and above the fund which Government offers to provide; for you had heard that there are very large masses of population in some districts without any Church near them, or without any room in any Church, if they went far for it; and you would therefore recommend cess to be kept for its present uses, and if Church property be otherwise improved, that that improved value should be employed in raising the income of small livings, and in building and endowing new churches." Now, here again, so far from having to differ from you in the slightest respect as to the necessity of providing means of participating in religious ordinances, I unreservedly acknowledge that necessity; I go further, and affirm it to be the highest duty in respect of what a Christian owes to his neighbour, that he should do his utmost to afford him such means of grace, as I in confidence believe flow from a participation in the public worship of our God and Saviour.

But let us see whether the fact of there being a dearth of Church room and of spiritual ministrations in some districts, and the necessity of remedying such acknowledged evil, make it impossible to give up the right of cess by vestry. Before we go a step further, however, you must remember that the Government was induced to come forward with their

present proposal, because they felt that such cess might not in future be obtained in sufficient supply to provide for the decent solemnization of the service, and the proper repair of the buildings belonging to the Establishment. If this impression be correct, then it is assuredly far wiser to apply the fund which the Government measure would create to maintaining the churches at present in existence, than to building new ones. Any proposal, therefore, for endowing new churches out of the increased value of ecclesiastical property must be judged of in accordance with a fact which should be previously ascertained ; and that is, whether you can continue or not to raise Church Rates in amount sufficient to meet the purposes for which they were intended to serve.

But we will, if you please, take it for granted that you can both raise parochial cess in sufficient amount, and also have command of the other fund ; and then, my further statement is, that still the power in vestry to rate ought to be abolished, because every possible purpose, and every possible claim, of the Establishment can be met by means far better and easier to the community than by parochial assessment*.

I have not at this moment an opportunity of referring to figures, so that I cannot say how great, but certainly a very large, proportion of the property hitherto held by the Deans and Chapters was destined, by an Act introduced into Parliament last year, to go towards the augmentation of small livings. Let the incomes at present apportioned to the Bishops be dealt with in like manner. You will say, " that the salaries of the Bishops were last year under discussion, and that it would be unfair again to disturb the

* I will not mention voluntary contribution as one of these means, because I do not like to commit the duty of building and endowing churches to the voluntary, and therefore uncertain, exertions of unauthorised individuals, be they few or many.

arrangements then made." So long as no person now receiving his income under such arrangement is touched, there is no more unfairness in making any future change than there was unfairness in making a change last year. On this subject I speak with much deference; knowing how many just and wise men have adopted an opinion different from my own. My opinion, however, I will not conceal, and that is,—that the incomes still set apart for the Bishops is very far too large; that so long as there be seven or eight prelates receiving from £15,000 to £5,000 a year, and all the rest receiving not less than £4,000 a year, it cannot be said that the necessities of the Establishment have received due proportion of what might be set apart to meet them from the funds belonging to it, or that any case is made out for resorting to a new, or perpetuating an old, tax. But suppose the prelates be permitted to hold all that they were, I think so unadvisedly, allowed to retain, when their salaries were under revisal, we have then another resource, one especially set apart for the *augmenting of small, and endowing new, churches*; I mean the "first fruits and tenths." The country has not the less a real title to this fund than the Church has to tithes. The nation chooses to take it according to a valuation made in the time of Henry VIII., but I imagine might claim it in its improved value when it chose to do so. This resource, consisting of the first year's income of every benefice, when conferred, and the tenths of the tithes annually afterwards, would yield a very large revenue, far more than enough, with what is meant to be taken from the Chapters, and what ought to be taken from the Bishops, and quite enough, perhaps, without them to make the Church of England, at the same time, the best paid, and the most efficient, of any under the sun.

But if all or any of these were not enough, or were denied, then there is another resource still, viz., a better apportion-

ment of tithes. Tithes form the specific tax which the nation has imposed on itself, for the purpose of endowing the Church; and I am persuaded that in a better apportionment of tithe alone you would supply ample endowment for a most efficient Church,—you could sow the seed of the Gospel throughout the whole length and breadth of the land,—and so leave the fund now offered by Government to take the place of the sums now depending on parochial assessment, without looking to that fund for any aid whatever as far as endowment is concerned.

If I have at all made you partake of my conviction, that in the property of the Chapters, of the Bishops, in the first fruits and tenths, and in a better apportionment of tithes among the clergy, either together or separately, there is more than fund sufficient to cover every one possible demand of the Establishment, you will assent to my conclusion, that as the money raised by Church Cess is not also wanted for these purposes, it is wiser to adopt the fund offered by the Government measure than perpetuate an unnecessary tax, or longer to throw the Church upon a resource which has hitherto proved itself uncertain and inadequate.

IV. But then you objected, “why all this is to meddle with property, is to take the management of the Church property out of the hands of the clergy.” This is just one of the cuckoo-cries got up for the occasion. I see it much insisted on in various speeches and debates. “Only conceive what vast indignity to take from clergymen, whether prelates or otherwise, the full control over their property.” I pass over the absurdity of speaking of Church property, as though the property of the clergyman, who may happen to be, for the time, in the enjoyment of it,—and I rejoin, “only mark the extreme inconsistency, the strange forgetfulness, or the naked dishonesty of those who are trying to get up a grievance, and to work such honest men as yourself into some little excite-

ment, by such an objection." For, just remember what has happened within these very few years. First, as to the Irish Church, it was thought that there were too many bishops there; so it was determined, that as a certain number of bishopricks became vacant, no fresh appointment should be made, and the property belonging to the bishopricks should be vested in Commissioners, to be dealt with as an Act of Parliament directs. This was one meddling with Church property. Then, again, the see of Derry was supposed to be too rich, and, accordingly, that bishop was compelled by Act of Parliament to pay over a certain portion of the income derived from the estates belonging to his see, to the Commissioners, he himself ceasing to have any control over the application of the money whatever,—this was another meddling with Church property. Now, come to England: the Cathedral Chapters were supposed to need reform. The property of the Chapters no less belongs to these corporations than the property of every see belongs to the bishop in possession of it. But what happens to the Chapters?—Their property is to be taken out of their hands, and placed in that of Commissioners, who have to pay the shadow of the former corporation a fixed sum, and to apply all the rest to augmenting small livings, and this without the Chapters having anything to do with the appropriation whatever. This is another meddling. So again, the richer bishops are to be dealt with, as was the Bishop of Derry, many of them being obliged to pay so much of the income derived from their estates to the Church Commissioners, in order that these Commissioners may pay certain fixed salaries to the remaining bishops. This is another instance of meddling. But now for another notable example.—You know that the right of presenting to a benefice is as much a property as any other description of property whatever, and the Chapters were richly endowed with this kind of property; but

far the larger proportion of this property, it is now proposed to take from the Chapters and vest in the bishops: Now, I have been particular in asking your attention to all these instances of interfering with, controlling, chopping, and changing, and taking away altogether, of Church property, because each of them has been recommended by a Commission consisting principally of *the highest dignitaries of the Church*; and I beg of you to bear those facts in mind, because it will enable you to ask, what right any man can have to claim sympathy for the bishops, as though they could be injured, or disrespectfully treated by the Government, carrying out the very principles which the prelates themselves recommended. I ask you also, seeing how these things are, whether you can at all doubt, that all the bluster which is made about it, is only the artifice of the hypocrite? Whether you can possibly fail to perceive that the cry of robbery, whenever any new apportionment of Church revenue is mentioned, is but the cry of knaves*?

As to the objection about meddling with tithes, there is no more soundness in it than in the other. As to the practice, see what it has been.—I received my present benefice, with a legal right vested in me, to take the tenth of all borne by the land within its limits. What did you do last year?—You passed an Act, taking away from me the right which I held, of exacting the tenth in future of what was produced in the parish, and told me I must be content in time to come with what *had been the tenth* for the last seven years, so that if this parish yielded twice as much hereafter, my tenth would only be one-half of what I thought was secured to me by law, when I was put in possession of my benefice. I do not blame you for thus doing;

* It would be exceedingly easy to show you, if you wanted to know, or it were worth while to take up your time, that the Government plan offers exceedingly great advantages to the bishops as a body.

on the contrary, I think that the clergy will themselves be much benefited by the adjustment. But I beg of you not to strain at a gnat, when you have so lately, and with much apparent ease, managed to swallow a camel. There are some, in both Houses of Parliament, who make much outcry if it be proposed to appropriate any funds which accrue from Church property, and which are not needed for any Church purpose to any thing so unholy as education; and there is another set who babble about rights of property when a new apportionment of tithe among the English clergy is mentioned, as facilitating the extension of gospel blessings; but nevertheless all seemed to agree with wonderful harmony last year when it was proposed that the clergy should no longer have a right to the tenth, but that the difference between what we had been receiving in time past and the tenth in future should be appropriated to their own pockets. I leave those statesmen who are always boasting that they are martyrs on the subject of appropriation, and those most mischievous allies of the Church, who vent all their wrong-headedness in what they suppose its defence, to explain their meek submission to this wholesale method of curtailing the former rights of its clergy, as best they can.

V. After I had stated these things to you, you took up your ground on what, I am happy to say, was your last objection. "You thought the whole matter a first step towards disconnecting the Church from the State. You thought it was in some degree introducing the principle of a voluntary Church." I by no means wonder at your having taken up such a notion; our politicians, and our newspaper writers, know quite well the manly and noble temper of the heart of England; they know quite well how that heart yearns towards its Church with all its faults; they know quite well that they have only to persuade the people that sacrilegious

hands are about to be placed on the ark which God has committed to our care, in order to make that people rise as one man armed, and crush the bold intruder. Hence the greatest possible pains have been taken by men who by such conduct show they have no part in the generous feelings of their countrymen, to make you suppose that the Government is purposely betraying the Church,—that the Government really desires to disconnect Church from State,—that the Government is endeavouring to pave the way for the change of the Establishment into a voluntary Church. There is but one way of meeting any such kind of hint, where men dare not roundly affirm the untruth, or any such accusation, where men have proceeded so far in shamelessness as not to be afraid to utter falsehood. It is one of which I have already given you a sample, and shall now again adopt it. Accordingly, if any man venture to tell you that the Government in its proposal has an intention of disconnecting the Church from the State, tell that man he is stating that which is untrue. And if you have not confidence enough in your own judgment to affirm this as of your own mind, then show him this passage, show him my name and residence given at the end of this letter, and let him know that a beneficed clergyman of the Church is not afraid thus publicly, not only to assert of such an one that he speaketh that which is untrue, but to assert further that if he have had sufficient instruction to be able to understand what he reads, and will affirm, after reading the Government project, that their proposal does in any degree disconnect Church from State, such an one speaketh that *deliberately* which he *knows* to be untrue.

I by no means intend to say that there may not be very many conscientious and well-informed persons, who look upon the yielding of this measure as an uncalled for concession to the clamour of Dissenters, and of some few other

men, whose complaints are not worthy of any notice. I would by no means be thought to deny that the proposal of Government affords extremely just opportunity of grave and anxious discussion. But I would be understood to affirm positively, as a matter of fact, not a matter of opinion,—as a point which admits no discussion,—that in this proposal, in itself, there is neither disconnection of Church from State, nor any one principle of voluntarism introduced.

My notion of a voluntary Church is, a Church depending altogether for its ministrations upon the voluntary contributions of its members; so that if the means of religious worship and instruction be granted to any denomination of Christians by the State, no matter how, so they be but provided for, according to my notion, that communion of Christians cannot be said to be a voluntary Church, but the connection of that communion with the State is so complete as to render it a National Church. Now what is the case in this instance; the Government proposes that the nation should deal in a certain manner with certain funds, in which none but the nation has any permanent interest—we will suppose the legislature adopts the proposal—well, it so deals with these funds as to create a surplus over and above the purposes for which they have already served; *this surplus* the legislature chooses to apply to those purposes for which Church Cess is now collected—the legislature *then* finds that this surplus can provide for all those purposes, and that therefore a Church Cess becomes unnecessary—*accordingly* the legislature remits that tax. This is the whole and true state of the case; and I should think it very extraordinary indeed, if you, or any man of sense, or any person who could so much as see that six is very much the same thing as half a dozen, should, after calmly looking into the case, persist in saying that a shifting by the State of a charge upon the community, to a fund which the State

provides, is an abandonment of the Church, is a throwing of it upon the charities and uncertainties of voluntarism. You may differ with the legislature as to what funds are the best to be applied to the maintenance of the Church; but so long as the State does provide fully for the Church out of some funds, do not, in the name of common sense, be so perversely blind as to talk of voluntarism, or of separation of Church from State.

But I am aware of a fallacy which perhaps may hamper you, as it seems to have hampered some of whom we might have expected better things. There appears to be a lurking notion in the minds of many, that there must be an actual and direct payment by every one, whether Dissenter or not, towards the maintenance of your Church, in order to make it a National Church. They oppose the notion of compulsion to the notion of voluntarism, and cannot for their lives perceive how, if there be no compulsion, the Church does not become voluntary; and so they insist upon keeping up the right to cess, as a visible and outward proof that our Church is not voluntary.

If you have read with attention what I before said, you will understand how there need be no cess, and yet the Church remain a National Church. But I will put a case or two to show you the folly of this notion. You are perhaps aware that there are some districts tithe free. Now did you ever hear that those who were in the otherwise comfortable condition of not having to pay tithes, and so not burthened with the maintenance of a minister, were placed thereby in the dangerous predicament of being thrust out from the pale of the Established Church?—Did you ever hear it hinted that any such tithe-free parish, township, farm, or as the case might be, ever felt itself so much a truant or rebellious child of Mother Church as to come sorrowing and implore leave to pay tithes, as the condition of again belonging to the National Church?

Perhaps you are also aware that there are some parishes to which estates have been left for the purpose of repairing and maintaining their churches; and that, accordingly, in such parishes, Church Cess is not so much as mentioned. Now I ask you in this case again, did you ever hear it said of these parishes that because they had no occasion to rate themselves they belonged not to the National, but to a voluntary Church? Or what would you think of the sense of these people if they were so worked upon by the eloquence which we are told is doing such wonders among the rural districts, as to repent themselves of their long freedom from rates, and to throw away indignantly this bribe which had so long blinded them to what was due to the Established Church, and to refuse to suffer any longer the hardship of having their Church well maintained, and its services decently administered, without the aid of any cess from themselves?

But, in sober earnestness, if these parishes do not cease to belong to the National, nor become a voluntary Church, because their churches and their services are maintained without any tax upon themselves in shape of rate, why should it be otherwise in the case of any other parish, or in any number of parishes, even though it include all England, if like funds were supplied, and so the tax of rate become unnecessary. Your case is this,—that you will admit that parishes may avail themselves of the benefactions of private individuals, but that you will not admit that parishes may be relieved through a national fund. I cannot believe you will persist in any such one-sided view of the matter. In my humble apprehension, so long as the maintenance of churches, and the due solemnization of public worship, are to depend upon the *free* (and *irresponsible*) choice of parishes in vestry assembled, whether they will grant rates for such purposes or not, the Church can with much more

propriety be said to partake of a voluntary character than were possible if the Government carried its measure, and so secured an efficient fund for all these purposes over which no parish could have any control, which no caprice could diminish, no hostility divert. Indeed, so far from the fact being that the abolition of rates destroys the connection between Church and State, the Government plan takes away that only one point on which the Church had anything of a voluntary character at all about it; and by providing for *all* its wants out of a national fund, makes it even more a National Establishment than it was before. You should be ashamed, even for one moment, to have been blinded so as not to have seen so naked a truth as this which I have just stated. Much more ought they to be ashamed who knowingly spread about so mischievous a delusion, as that abolition of rates means, or would bring about, a disconnection between England and her Church.

VI. I cannot close without adverting to an expression you more than once used, "That the tax was so light you did not see why it could not patiently be borne; and that to bear it, if an evil, were perhaps a less evil than the trouble and difficulty of change." I advert to this, because I think the smallness of the tax (which I fully admit) is but a convincing proof that Church Rates form an extremely bad fund for the Church to rely on for any useful purpose. The tax is small, not because the necessities of the Church require *only as much* as is raised by rates, but because parishes do not choose to tax themselves in amount sufficient to meet all the objects which depend upon rates. If parishes chose to do their duty by their churches the tax would be exceedingly increased; and, you may depend on it, that if you were to go on relying upon rates, every year you lived you would see the tax become smaller and smaller, until it altogether ceased. It is because I think

the Church severely pinched as it is, and likely every day to be more and more pinched under the system of rates, so that our buildings will be suffered to go to ruin, that I want a certain, fixed, and adequate fund instead of the far too small a tax which parishes now impose on themselves.

And on another point, one short word. Some, I am much afraid, resist the abolition of rates because they will not forego the opportunity which the exaction of the rate affords for insulting and annoying the Dissenter. My good friend, as you love your own Church, much more as you love your Saviour, avoid this most guilty motive. So long as the Church has to depend upon rates, so long as rates be granted, take without scruple from the Dissenter what the Dissenter may not, without disobedience to the law of his country, and express violation of Scripture precept*, withhold. But he little knows the principles on which our Church is founded; he little knows for what great truths its martyrs struggled against the domination of Rome, and freely shed their blood; he little knows the liberty with which the Gospel vests each Christian mind, who presumes, nay, who dares to be angry with a brother because he may not have been able to join the same outward communion of which he himself happens to be a member. It is high time, my friend, that you, and others like unto you, should be made aware of the attempts which are now being made by some amongst its Clergy, to graft upon the Church of England some of the worst errors of that of Rome. Blind and rancorous hostility toward Dissenters is but the result of a narrow, bigotted, unscriptural view of the authority and position of our own Church. Your duty is to be thoroughly aware of the weakness and imperfection of the human mind,—to be more suspicious of yourself being right, than convinced another is wrong,—to be ready and willing

* Romans xiii. 1-6.

to believe that in all denominations Christ has brethren,—to be as willing to be kind towards, and considerate of one, who in conscience, and perhaps regret, differs from you, as of one who kneels with you and prays with you in the same House of God.

My recapitulation shall be very short.

I grant to you that it is a fair question of discussion whether the plan which the Government proposes for the maintenance of Churches, and their services, offers advantages above the system of rates now existing. I grant also that it is matter of fair discussion whether the improved value of ecclesiastical property, as well as the right of cess, be not fully needed in order to meet the intentions for which a church is established at all. I trust on these points I have given my opinion with all due temperance. I have argued the matter almost entirely as a churchman's question, seldom having adverted to the Dissenters at all. I have declared that, as a churchman, for the Church's sake, and for the sake of the community, I desire the substitution of the fund which Ministers offer for the present almost useless system of parochial assessment. But principally have I taken the trouble of writing to you this full statement of our previous discussion, because I was most anxious to do my utmost to counteract the wicked effort of those who spare no deceit, artifice, slander, falsehood, which may blind the people, and lead them astray from their best interests; and hence have I particularly addressed myself to the accusation which those persons would more infer than openly bring against the Government, that the Government contemplates abolition of all fund whatever for the maintenance of churches—that the Government has betrayed the Church to Dissenters—that the Government desires to disconnect the Church from the State. I am sorry that I should have had so often to use such harsh terms as I have not scrupled

to apply to these parties. Much rather would I deal with those things that belong to peace. But there are times when silence and acquiescence are crimes : such are those on which we have fallen. I write to a plain man, I therefore employ plain terms.

I should be sorry to see a most base conspiracy, above all when founding itself on the most hypocritical pretence of attachment to the Church, succeed in strangling a measure which I, in my heart and conscience, believe is necessary to bind up many a wound, to secure repose to the community, to place the Establishment on so sure and wide a basis as it has not yet occupied since England was a nation. I commend these observations to your consideration, and remain,

Your faithful Friend,

GILBERT ELLIOT.

TEMPLELOWESBY,

March 28, 1837.

POSTSCRIPT.

I have purposely abstained from entering into the details of the Government plan ; suffice it to say, that by it every bishop is secured in exactly the same income which he now possesses ; that every leaseholder is at liberty to purchase the land or other property he holds ; that if the improved value of the bishop's property does not yield sufficient for Church purposes, the difference is to be paid out of the general taxation of the country. You know, I think, that we ought not to apply to the general taxes until all Church property, which can be justly made available, has been employed for Church purposes ; and I dare say the Go-

vernment is just as much convinced as I am, that there will be no occasion whatever for going to the general taxes. But, at any rate, it was wisely done to provide this resource, because it takes away all possible ground for fear that the Church interests should be neglected, and all possible excuse from those either shameless or else ignorant persons, who affirm that if the Government carries its measure, churches will certainly fall into neglect and ruin.



